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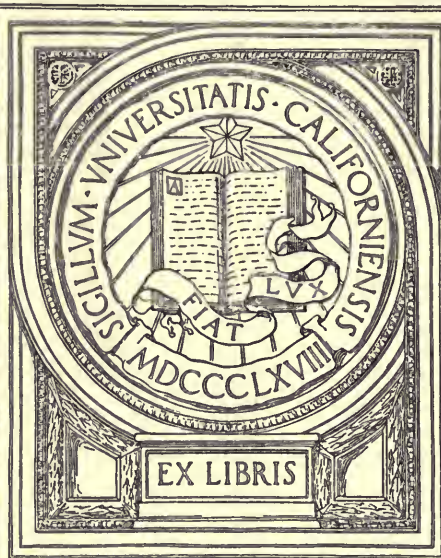
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Henry Bradshaw, Librarian
and Scholar

By

Ewald Flügel

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
AT LOS ANGELES



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HENRY BRADSHAW

Librarian and Scholar

BY

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HENRY BRADSHAW: LIBRARIAN AND SCHOLAR.*

THE facts of Henry Bradshaw's life are well known, and can easily be traced in the "Dictionary of national biography" or Prothero's biography. His was a scholar's life of no stirring events, but to me, although my personal contact with this great man was of the slightest, it represents the highest type of scholarly service, and in him I have for years admired the librarian of librarians.

Henry Bradshaw "belonged to the Irish branch of an old English family," and was born in London, on Feb. 3, 1831. He was educated at Eton and King's College, Cambridge, became a Fellow of King's in 1853, and taught school near Dublin until 1856, when he returned to Cambridge to accept a place as assistant librarian in the university, or, as it used to be called, the Public Library. It was here that the two great ideals of his later life made themselves first felt, and the conflict first entered his heart whether he should devote himself to the library or to scholarship. He found that the opportunities for "work," for acquisition of knowledge, were not sufficient, and, honest and logical as he always was, he resigned in 1858, in order to devote himself as a private scholar to the study of the manuscripts and early printed books of his university library. His knowledge in these matters, and his zeal and ability became recognized and the authorities created a special place for him in 1859 at a nominal salary, but without any restrictions, without any control. This was a rather anomalous situation which elicited the following remark when (1867) M. Holtrop asked leave to dedicate to him his "Etudes bibliographiques": "As for my titles, I have none whatever. In the library I am nothing whatever. I receive a salary on the express stipulation that I tell the world that I have no status whatever in the place." (Life. p. 152.)

But even though his place was not officially recognized, it was better so for Bradshaw's own development. It left him free to work along his own lines, to gather the tools for his great work wherever he could get them; it helped him to obtain that phenomenal knowledge, that mastery in bibliography and palæotypography which only frequent trips to other English and continental libraries could give him, while his study of the Cambridge mss. made him the first authority on this subject, and led him to that long and unbroken series of splendid discoveries which made him famous in many a field of scholarship. Among these there is first the discovery of the "Book of Deer" in 1857, of the Celtic glosses in the Juvencus ms. in 1858 (which meant practically the discovery of the ancient Breton language), of the missing volumes of Morland's Vaudois mss. and their true date in 1862, of Colard Mansion's "L'Estrif de Fortune et Vertu" in 1866, and of Barbour's "Lives of saints and Siege of Troy."

Besides these brilliant achievements he mastered a multitude of languages, beginning with Swedish and ending with Tibetan, Armenian, etc., and worked in Chaucer, Wycliffe, Caxton, "anatomized" (to use his own phrase) the early Dutch printers, established the rime-test for Chaucer, and the original order of the Canterbury Tales, throwing light on every subject which he touched. We find him further exposing the lies of Simonides the forger from a new corner, while he was busily engaged in college politics, while he fought successfully for the abolition of religious tests and against the "celibacy of Fellows" and "idle Fellowships."

We can fully appreciate his sigh: "If I can only keep from side-work," and the truth of the witty answer when some one asked

*A paper read before the Association, January 8, 1904.

what Bradshaw was doing: "Oh, he's doing something else."

But the way in which he had been "doing something else" for eight years produced its fruit, when, on March 8, 1867, he was finally elected to succeed Prof. Mayor as university librarian. To him this recognition of his ability was by no means an unmixed joy; he realized that it meant a great sacrifice, the sacrifice of the opportunity of gathering the harvest of his work as a scholar. It meant that many favorite subjects which he had at heart, some of which required just the finishing touch, would have to be banished into the background, since for him it was more than a theoretical maxim that the librarian's first duty was to put himself at the service of others.

But, much as we may regret our loss from the standpoint of the scholar, it was in his position as librarian that those qualities were fully developed, which brought him to the front rank of English librarians of his time, qualities which proved him to be also one of the great men of his time.

From now on his tremendous and ever-growing scholarship became more directly helpful to others, and became, directly or indirectly, a constant, never-failing source of information. And it was not only the quality and quantity, but also the *way* in which this help was given that made him so prominent; the frankness and fulness, as much as the friendliness and kindness, the true generosity of heart. We come across innumerable instances of his unselfishness during these years. We see how he transfers thousands of his own Irish books to the library, how he makes valuable gifts to colleges, how he pays an unknown scholar's debts, and endows secretly the first chair of archæology at his university—a secret which was strictly kept until after his death. We are touched by the charming way in which he insists on young Conway's accepting a stipend from him in order to finish his study of 15th century woodcuts. Conway was a serious student, young, friendless, "in the dumps." He had taken up a subject in which Bradshaw had been deeply interested himself, and he felt that it was merely repaying what the university had done for him when in his own younger, friendless and penniless years it gave him a "kind of endowment of research post." And he was doing all this on

a salary of but \$2000, and not so many years after he had been obliged to sell by auction the better part of his own library.

We find him in active correspondence with Dr. Furnivall on the plans of the Early English Text Society, and with a score of other scholars on their most special specialties.

In what a liberal spirit he hails ten Brinck's "Chaucer studies"! This man, in whom a more selfish spirit would have seen a competitor, became at once his friend. "At last," he writes, "I have found the man whom I have been longing to see for many years past, and I feel sure you will forgive me for my boldness in writing to you direct, to thank you most warmly for the first part of your 'Studies on Chaucer,' which I have been feasting on for a week or more." (p. 219.)

And when Mommsen came in 1885 to study the Gildas ms.—to which Bradshaw had devoted his energy years before—it delighted his heart to greet the scholar, and see him work; "it is as good as a month's holiday to see his method of working," he writes to a friend, and Mommsen himself he almost begs to ask questions. "Do not scruple to ask any number of questions about the MSS. which you think I am able to answer for you. It will be no loss, much less waste, of time to me; for I have longed for years past to find some one who will work at these books with grounded intelligence, and it is a real happiness to have lived to find the man. . . . It is, as you say, an extremely complex investigation; but it is its very complexity which interests me so much, and induces me to try my utmost to clear it up. I have done something towards this end in past years, but from not finding any scholar to whom my work could be of immediate use, I have never carried it through, as so many matters have stood in the way with more pressing claims. My primary duty as a librarian is, of course, rather to help scholars in their work to the best of my power than to pursue any favorite investigations of my own." (p. 315.)

As a return for his services he earned from Mommsen the remark that he had been more impressed by Henry Bradshaw than by any other man in England, and that he (Mommsen) longed for a shorthand writer to take down the information which he (Bradshaw) poured forth on subjects of common interest. And with great joy Mommsen told Professor Robertson Smith an anecdote which is char-

acteristic of Bradshaw's learning. "I will tell you," Mommsen said, "one thing; it is a small one, but it is characteristic. I told Mr. Bradshaw of a contraction I had seen in a manuscript of the British Museum, which, with all my experience of Pandect mss. I had never seen before. The British Museum people, who have *also* [!] great knowledge, had not seen it either. When I told it to Mr. Bradshaw he said nothing, but presently brought me a ms. and showed me the very thing."

To return to our summary of the events of his life, there are only a few more facts to be recorded after his appointment to the librarianship. First of all we must mention the clearing of the "Augean stable," as he occasionally calls it, or as Prothero calls it, more diplomatically, the reducing to order of the "somewhat chaotic condition" in which he found the library; the reorganization of the library, the reforming of what is — as he speaks of it — "by courtesy called the arrangement of the books"; the systematizing of the cataloging, the introduction of printed title-slips (years before the British Museum adopted this method), the introduction of a system of double-entry, with brief shelf-lists, the most careful watching over the bindery (the sheet arrangement of the Caxtons being spoiled in all the English libraries but that of Cambridge), etc., etc. This reorganization was not entirely according to his taste, because he could not work well through subordinates, and unnecessarily weighed himself down by attending to many things personally. The latter fact is well illustrated by the anecdote, that when the mss. were moved to new quarters, he himself and alone carried them "caressingly" from the old shelves.

In 1882 he presided over the fifth meeting of the Library Association (the first had taken place in 1877), and gave a splendid address, which is followed in its printed shape by a number of important "notes." In the same year he was elected to the General Board of Studies, the highest council of the university.

His later studies were on the Lincoln Cathedral Statutes, the Sarum Breviary, on the early collection of canons, called the *Hibernensis* (showing his wonderful knowledge of continental church constitutions), and on

the Day Book of John Dorne, the Oxford bookseller of 1520. His notes show what a loss it was to the world that he could not find the time to give us a new *Dibdin*.

But in the midst of all this activity came death, and deprived the world of Bradshaw's inestimable services. He had returned from supper, sat down to do a little more work on Irish bibliography, late at night, when the angel of death closed the book before him. The lamp had gone out, the fire was burnt down, when on the morning of Feb. 11, 1886, his servant found him sitting dead in his armchair before his desk.

Bradshaw was the first authority on early English and Irish bibliography in England, one of the first authorities on palæography, the first Chaucer scholar of his time, and in the front rank of more than one special study; and, above all, he was a great man, a warm-hearted, full-blooded, generous man, who had given the best example of his teaching, that the first duty of a librarian, and also his chief glory is unselfish devotion to his fellow-men.

The bulk of his published work seems small, but if we merely run over the titles we are astonished at the broadness of his scholarship, and if we further consider what a stupendous knowledge he brought to bear on the elucidation of the smallest points, if we consider his method, his ideals, his enthusiasm, the spirit of his work, the clearness of his head and judgment, his wonderful memory, retentive of the smallest details, his "*pouvoir divinatoire*" (as Jusserand calls it), his perpetual readiness, then we realize that we shall not see his like again.

Perhaps a few quotations from his writings may make more clear how strong and how high were his ideals of a librarian's work. I quote from his "Letters and papers":

"The most delightful thing in the world is to have people coming to you for help."

"Living as I do in charge of a very large library, where all I find is instantly at the service of my neighbors, I find but little leisure to put my results into print, and I have to content myself with the humbler position of helping students by oral communication."

That, in helping others, he was not satisfied with mere appropriation of his thoughts and suggestions, is emphasized in his sharp words:

"You are heartily welcome to anything I can tell you, but don't publish *my* work, publish your own."

"My only wish has been to collect facts, in order that others may form a judgment upon them."

"As for originality I, of course, never laid claim to any new facts. My only point is my method, which I always insist on in anything in bibliography. Arrange your facts vigorously and get them plainly before you, and let them *speak for themselves*, which they will always do."

Let me add from his presidential address of 1882 the splendid definitions:

"*What is a library?* A library is a collection of books brought together for the use of those who wish to read them; these readers falling for the most part into the two very distinct classes of readers of books and writers of books."

"*What is a librarian?* A librarian is one who earns his living by attending to the wants of those for whose use the library under his charge exists, his primary duty being, in the widest possible sense of the phrase, to save the time of those who seek his services."

And condensing the history of modern libraries into a few sentences, he says:

"Libraries may be said to go through several successive stages, though the higher stages are frequently never reached or even contemplated. *The most elementary kind* exists only for readers. It is represented by the lower class of circulating library, and by the simplest form of branch, in places where central free libraries exist. It must not be thought that I am depreciating the value of this elementary institution. It corresponds to the boys' library of our schools, and (though you will perhaps be surprised to hear me say so) to the whole of our university and college libraries here, as they existed in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Their object was exclusively *practical*; they were collections of books brought together simply for the use of those who wanted to read, and had not the means to buy books for themselves. Education makes people want to read, and the libraries exist to supply this want.

"*A higher stage* is reached when the funds at the disposal of a library come to be in part devoted to the acquisition of books, which form the necessary working materials of those

who are engaged in writing books, but cannot afford to buy all the books which they need for their work. What is useful in this way to one person will almost certainly be useful to another, and thus it becomes worth while to incur some outlay with this object, and so to make the libraries available for study as well as simply for reading what are called readable books.

"The *character*, the higher stamp, thus given to a library, soon produces results. We know that 'to every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance.' When even small resources are well husbanded and made useful for a higher class of work by good management, donations flow in; and men who have spent half a lifetime and half a fortune upon the formation of a library will leave or even give their books to a place where they feel confident that good use will be made of them. This is the process by which all our great libraries have been formed. I have no reason to fear contradiction if I say that in every library of note in this kingdom down to the last fifty or sixty years the bought books formed but a very minute portion of the whole collection in comparison with those which were given or bequeathed."

As the watchword of the university library he states: "*Liberty and Discretion.*" "We say to those who use our library: 'The rule is (1) *liberty for you* to go freely about the whole library, examining what books you choose and borrowing what books you like; and (2) *discretion on our part*, exercised in putting such extremely moderate restrictions upon your freedom, that the safety of the more precious books is regarded, and the presence of the books most constantly needed for reference is secured, without undue interference with your access to the shelves or your borrowing from the library.'"

Let me draw two important lessons from Bradshaw's life and thoughts:

First, that the librarian must be a scholar, able as well as ready to bring his scholarship to the help of his public.

Second, that a library of any ambition must be above a merely and exclusively *practical* basis.

Formulating the latter point differently, I should say, that since the library is no ephemeral institution, it ought not to bind itself exclusively to present needs, to the present

time; it should consider the future as well as the present, *it should take special care to collect for the future.*

Finally, I should like to emphasize Bradshaw's words on book bequests and their place in the history of English libraries.

The library, by not being confined too closely to present needs, will become naturally the hospitable sheltering-place, the refuge for private collections, it will become the magnet to attract private collections formed for special purposes, collections which may not appeal to the present generation, but which will become invaluable in later times.

The main point, at present, is to rid the public of the mediæval ideal of a library, the kindergarten ideal, the frying-pan ideal, which

says that libraries exist exclusively or mainly for *present* uses, for "readers" only (to use the phrase of Bradshaw).

Our public must learn to regard the library as a place for all time, a *Temple of the Future* — then only the library will be distinguishable from a mere counting-house, a mere book-stall.

When the library begins to consider the future at least as much as the present, and to count the scholar as belonging to its "Public," then the old saying will become true, and the library will become the *University of the Future*. And here we have again arrived at the intimate connection between the library and scholarship, so wonderfully represented by Henry Bradshaw — librarian and scholar.

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